

Spain's tourism industry records worst semester ever after reopening borders

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Dhaka: The coronavirus-led crisis continues to flatten Spain's tourism industry. According to figures published on August 3 by the National Statistics Institute (INE), just 204,926 international visitors arrived in Spain in June, a drop of 97.7 per cent from the same month in 2019.

This culminates the worst semester on record for the Spanish tourism industry, with just 10.78 million visitors, a fall of 71.7 per cent from the same period in 2019.

Tourist spending in the first half of the year has also plunged 70.6 per cent to just EUR 11.84 billion.

This means that the sector has lost 27.3 million visitors and EUR 28.4 billion in revenue in the first half of the year compared with the same period last year.

And the new outbreaks, coupled with travel advisories issued by several countries, suggest that things will not improve significantly during the second half of the year.

In mid-March, the Spanish government declared a state of alarm in a bid to curb the spread of COVID-19, which limited all non-essential trips to the country. On June 21, the state of alarm came to an end and Spain reopened its borders to countries within the Schengen Area (with the exception of Portugal, which reopened on July 1). But despite laxer travel restrictions, Spain's tourism industry has been unable to bounce back.

All of Spain's regions recorded a sharp drop in the first half of the year, with tourists arrivals falling 92.2 per cent in the Balearic Islands, 74 per cent in Catalonia, 72.5 per cent in Andalusia and 63.8 per cent in Madrid.

Tourist spending also fell in line with the drop in visitors. According to the latest figures from the INE, tourists in Spain spent EUR 133 million in June – just 1.4 per cent of the figure from the same month last year.

Making matters worse, several European countries have since issued warnings against travel to regions in Spain, while the United Kingdom, Norway and Slovenia have re-imposed quarantine measures on travellers from the country.

Industry groups believe this will result in even greater losses than the EUR 40 billion forecast, and warn that 750,000 jobs may be at risk in the second semester.

The crisis has also impacted air travel. In the first half of the year, 43.5 million travellers passed through airports run by Spain's airport operator AENA, a fall of 66 per cent from last year's figures, and 50 per cent less than in 2009, when Spain was suffering from the fallout of the financial crisis.

Although it is not yet known what impact the travel measures will have on the sector, José Luis Zoreda, Deputy President of Spanish tourism lobby Exceltur, said, "The Spanish tourism industry will not in any way be able to compensate for the fall in foreign visitors."